A REBEL'S GUIDE TO SITUATIONISM

In preparing this glossary of terms commonly used in situationist theory, we found our main difficulty was not so much explaining them simply, but explaining them adequately. We had to stop the branch-out and deepening of our analyses simply for reasons of space. We trust, however, that our readers will find them a fairly helpful volume, not entirely boring prelude to further exploration—and that, above all, they will recognize ideas of their own in what we have to say. If we go to a lot of trouble to make certain words really ours, it is because we realize that not doing so would leave us able to fight only on Power's terms, and we would be able to think only in those terms. In a very important sense, to recover the meaning of words for yourself is to make your mind your own again.

Dennis Diderot
Jean-Paul Marat

Proletariat n.: the class of all those who have to sell their labor-power in order to survive, and who, therefore, have no control over the use of their own lives. This term was originally used by Marx to mean the industrial workers, but in our time, the proletariat has expanded to include service, technical, and clerical ("white collar") workers—in fact, the huge majority of the population. Hence the term proletarianization. Revolutionary theory cannot glorify the proletariat, "proletarian culture," "proletarian morality," etc. They cannot be the only glorification of alienation itself. What is positive about the proletariat is the historical possibility of its self-liberation: since, for the first time in history, the will itself is to abolish itself, by abolishing Capital, class society and alienated labor. That is its only glory.

Bourgeoisie n.: The early epoch originated in the merchants, usurers, and bankers of the seventeenth century, and so is the development of urban industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth. It superceded the aristocracy as the political ruling class of Europe during the revolutions of 1640, 1789, etc. In America, the bourgeoisie led the rebellion against colonial domination. Historically, it has been the class of private ownership of the means of social production. It is now becoming gradually superseded in its turn by the state and corporate bureaucracy (see, for example, the joint management of the "defense" industries by the Pentagon bureaucracy and the corporate ones, the Penn Central Railroad affair, etc.)

Marx used the term specifically as a synonym for the salary, labor in any form (i.e., "labor" both as labor-power in current use in the market, as dead labor, and as dead labor, labor turned into an object; goods).

"Through sale, the labor of an individual becomes the "product" of another, it is appropriated by another, it comes under the control of another. In other words, a person's activity becomes the activity of another, the activity of a whole society. Hence becomes alien to the person who performs it. Thus one's life, the accomplishments of an individual in the world, the difference one makes to the life of humanity, are not only transformed into labor, a painful condition for survival; they are transformed into alien activity, alienated labor, performed by the buyer of that labor. In capitalist societies, the architects, the engineers, the laborers, are not referred to as "builders," the men who earn their living is called the "builder." The workers in a branch of industry are not referred to as "the producers"; the owner of the industry, the management, or the corporate name is. The projects, calculations and operations carried out by the workers are not their own, are not decided by them, but are executed of the orders of others and are subservient to their living activity, their accomplishments, belong to capital.

Academic sociologists, who take the sale of labor for granted, can only define labor as a feeling: the worker's activity "appears" alien to the worker, it "seems" to be controlled by another. However, Marx instead appeals to the academic sociologist that the alienation is not only a feeling and an idea in the worker's head, but a real fact about the world today: all work activity is in fact alien to the worker; his labor is in fact controlled by its buyer. Alienation exists subjectively and objectively.

"In exchange for his activity, the worker gets money, the means of survival in capitalist society. With this money he buys commodities, things, but he cannot buy back his activity. This reveals a peculiar "gap" in money as the "universal equivalent": A person who gets his money, and he can buy the same commodities with money. He can sell his living activity for money, but he cannot buy his living activity for money." An unequal exchange hides under the appearance of a desire for the exchange between capital and living labor.

The things the worker buys with his wages are first of all authentic commodities, things that enable him to survive, to reproduce his labor-power so as to be able to continue selling it; and they are spectacle, objects for consumption, which the worker consumes and admires the products of human activity passively. He does not exist in the world as an active agent who transforms itself by a historical process. He is an important spectator: he may call this state of powerless admiration "happiness," and since labor is painful, he may desire to be "happy" in his work and struggle to find a "human life (a condition similar to being dead)." The commodities, the spectacles, consume him; he uses up living energy in passive contemplation of the things produced by consumed things. In this sense, the more he has, the more he is.


The consequences of this central fact, this alienation, by the vast majority of people, of their socially productive powers, of their very selves in a social sense, of social relations and more and more human relations become commodity relations—people are brought together and interact, not out of some mutual affinity, but on terms defined by money exchange. Think of an average day: you get up, you go to work—the place where you stay, your co-workers, don't talk there because they like working together, or because they have nothing in common with each other; you have nothing in common with most of them except being there to do the same thing. The same with the laundromat, and, as often as not, the movie theatre you go to after dinner. Human beings are mostly brought together, in modern society, to do things for money; we buy things for money. We are the servants of money. The idea of real shared desire, on real affinity, are being rapidly squeezed out. No wonder the struggle for contact with another person that is meaningful. The thing that comes about as a result of the wills of individuals, is so desperate. People who are treated as objects, as machines, and who are forced by the necessities of their lives to treat others the same way, start to acquire the characteristics of objects, of machines. Their senses grow dull from the constant attempt to avoid being bored by more meaningful interactions, more empty exchanges with objectified people. Even thinking becomes pointless because it can't affect anything, so we forget how to think, or think only in spectacular, fetishized, reified categories offered by enough revolutionary power. Life is reduced to survival, to the daily fight to keep from dying of boredom, to keep from seeing what our existence is...
The real truth of Leninism was revealed when we slaughtered the party, the Soviet and the Communist Party of the Ukraine in 1921. Yet fifty years later our faithful followers continue the alienating hierarchy within their organization, and the corresponding manipulative practice, leading the masses to only believe by presenting a false form of opposition. The capital that still reigns everywhere.

Leninism: Ideology of state-capitalism in its repressive form.

But the process goes further than this: spectacles become topics of consumption, discussion, and even the subject of further spectacles (the "Tetigik" which, the conversation of urban children is monopolized by arguments about— and even renditions of— the TV programs they watch simultaneously: the "night before. Communication of lived experience becomes communication of (about) spectacles: communication of passivity, non-communication."

The spectacles in general are products of the social relations of non-communication, of isolation. Real means of communication would be means of (socio)communication: as opposed to the temporary mechanisms which have developed within the spectacle. Unilateral, one-way communication is always authoritarian: the giving orders.

The nightmare of the spectacle, of images which take on a "life" of their own, is fully realized when people consciously attempt to live up to the images with which they are presented: even in low-making, potentially the most perfect form of communication (the unity of pleasure- and pleasure-getting), human beings are constantly trying to present images of themselves to each other— "yndar," "fascist woman," etc.— by the examples of two human beings is lost in the pseudo-love-making of their spectacular images. (This is now officially recognized as a "problem" by sexologists.)

Meanwhile, the goods and services (commodities) produced by the proletariat are also part of the spectacle, in that they are sold back to the proletariat which produced them by means of their images: in advertising, the act of consumption itself is a spectacle. Commodity consumption becomes the only kind of consumption: "There are fewer and fewer gratifications for which one does not have to pay," Spectacular existence is by definition schizoid. "The more the spectacles of the socialist-revolutionary theory of unification (spectaculars which is the reason of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the lower the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires in that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him." (Debord, Society Of The Spectacle, p. 30).

Broadly considered, the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image, i.e., a consciousness. Since the spectacle is nothing other than capital in its concentrated self-destruction, the spectacle is capital creating a world in its own image. Capital in its own image. Capital in its own image. Capital in its own image. And the spectacle is the religion (ideology) neutralized. As in religion the self-power of human beings are alienated into the image of "God," so in the spectacle the self-power of human beings are alienated into more literal images, which nonetheless become "subjects" of their own sources, the human beings themselves. This is as true of the "proletarian" of the Chinese propaganda posters as it is of the "happy family" of Madison Avenue imagery. The Spectacle, in its various forms, rules the world which it represents itself.
Subversion n. (translation of the French "détournement," literally "diversion.") The process by which the spectacle is turned back on itself, turned inside out so that it reveals its own inner workings, which are the truth of the present world. This can be done in all kinds of ways: a good example is POINT-BLANK's recent "takeover" of the UK campus student newspaper, the Daily Cal, in which the editors announced that, since nothing ever happens in Berkeley, they were going to cease publication, and were turning the last issue over to a group of people who would describe the life of the student and sub-student in highly critical, and suggest what these people could do to make their lives really interesting (by taking back their lives into their own hands.). Radio, television, comic strips, posters, etc. can all be used in similar ways. The momentary subversive negation of the spectacle is the first step to the nightmare by everyone of the society which produces it and which it in turn produces.

Subversion is essentially playful: in a broader sense, subversion can be seen as the re-entry of play into any given aspect of daily life, at first on the level of disrupting the organization of appearances, and with the successful extension and generalization of the "situation" thus created, on the level of transforming the organization of power by putting all its techniques, its tools, its structures back into the empty space, to new purposes: Only play can deconstruct, open up the possibilities of total freedom. This is the principle of subversion, the freedom to change the sense of everything which serves Power; the freedom, for example, to turn a cardboard, a Coca Center or a shopping mall into a labyrinth, into a dream landscape... (Raoul Vaneigem)

Cocktail Party, Paris 1968

Self-management

Self-management n. (French: "autogestion") direct management of the economy, distribution, and communication by the producers and their communities. Not to be confounded with "workers control;" "collective management;" etc., which, under private or state capitalism, is merely a way of having workers organize their own alienation - or merely check-up on management or at most be allowed to elect representatives who, on a joint board with the real managers, decide on such matters as how best to fulfill production quotas, etc. - all the decisions that change nothing. We also separate our use of the term from Yugoslav "self-management," wherein workers become stockholders in their own capitalist enterprises producing commodities which compete against one another in a market economy, and elect a directorate committee to manage it - under, of course, the close supervision of the Party and State bureaucrats.

Self-management has appeared again and again all over the world - in Russia in 1905 and again in 1917, in Spain in 1936-37, in Hungary in 1956, in Algeria in 1960 and in Chile in 1972. The form of organization most often created in the practice of self-management has been the Workers Council or Russian "Soviet," etc., the soviet or workers' council. Whatever happens is that the workers in a given factory, transport system, telephone exchange, etc. form a general assembly which then elects committees of delegates to handle specific tasks, including self-defense and coordination with other enterprises which have also been seized by their workers. Operations are then carried on by these workers' management and in accordance with the needs defined by them - obviously, during a revolutionary crisis, the most important sectors being the production of food, weaponry, and electrical power, and the continued provision of medical care, telecommunication, and transportation services.

At their highest moments, the councils have made all state power unnecessary - their main failure in the past (with the exception of the Spanish workers and peasants of Catalonia in 1936-7) has lain in not realizing this, and hence destroying by force of arms the remaining bastions of authority and pretenders to the state. Self-management is the practical, determinate negation of the state and capital in the most direct form of wage labor and the commodity economy, and the end of all alienation - in fact, it is the means that the proletariat should to abolish itself by abolishing all classes. Self-management can tolerate no compromise with any secondary power - power over oneself; power over the factories; power over the shops; power over the administration which takes control of their own lives out of their own hands.

How is the formation of a new state power avoided? Firstly, of course, by the complete and total elimination of all bureaucratic structures along with the old reactionary, traditionist, one - see Leninism. Secondly, by ensuring that all power emanates from the general assemblies and workers' councils and that the general assemblies themselves are the councils, and not any committee of delegates emanating from them. Of course, there must be some kind of government, some kind of order must be established, but its members must remain strictly mandated, so that their function is limited to generalizing communication ("in the explicit wishes of their constituent general assemblies. No hierarchy of councils wherein control over the local assemblies would be passed to another delegate, could be tolerated. All delegates must be recallable at any time by their base."

In a modern society, the routine proceedings could be constantly televised and shown on monitor-screens everywhere: assemblies could elect rotating "broad committee" to keep an eye on them. Among other reasons, delegates could be recalled for being boring. (It goes without saying that the membership of the central coordinating council must be rotated too, as often as possible: we must guard against the appearance of any new specialists in power, as also the power of specialists)

Finally, it must be understood that the ultimate assurance of the success of self-management rests not with form - no formal guarantee, however elaborate, will be enough in itself - but with its content. On the individual level, this content is the consciousness, in the vast majority of the proletariat, of a deep desire for and an unswerving intention toward a free, creative, pleasurable life, under their own control. On the collective level, this content is what is being self-managed. Clearly, if this is only the existing economy, the existing type of production (assembly-lines, fragmented, boring work in general), the existing world - self-management is doomed to failure, and would be pointless anyway. Self-management, on the contrary, must be the collective administration of the total transformation of the world, of every aspect of daily existence.

Clearly, this broadens the definition of self-management considerably. First of all, neighborhood or community councils (or any autonomous group of housewives, ex-students, ex-school kids) would also be accountable, which would exchange delegates and soon enough whole worker-teams with the factory managers, and transport councils. No one would have to do the same thing all the time: the really unpleasant tasks would just rotate until all of them had been performed. New parks could be created; churches, office-blocks, and other now-useless buildings could be put to new and playful purposes; buying and selling "to the greatest possible advantage" would be pointless anyway. Self-management, on the contrary, must be the collective administration of the total transformation of the world, of every aspect of daily existence.

Let us reiterate that self-management is not an abstract idea, a utopian master-plan to be projected into the minds of the masses. Nearly all the things described above have already been done, and the essentials - the formation of councils for their federation by means of strictly mandated, revocable delegates, and their immediate attempts to transform the social environment - not once but many times. Self-management sees its small beginnings de facto control of the shop-floor by the workers in millions of factories everywhere; its organized sabotage to slow down the lines, in factories, banks, and "welfare services."

To paraphrase Marx, we call self-management the real movement which hides inside the present state of things. We could only add - and stress it again as to create a world of marxists.
Some of us want to break with that.

The women's participation in the development of our own daily lives to develop the possibilities for positive transformation appropriate to modern conditions. To a developed country. Certain tendencies of the American "movement" of the past ten years (People's Park, wildcats such as Lordstown or the post-Park "second wave" are, among others, an "anti-imperialist" feminist movement, etc.), offer glimpsers of the direction we want to take. But all of these, taken in isolation, have lacked the necessary cohesion and are inadequate to the most basic intuitions. The reason for this, in many ways peculiar to Americans, is that so many, in the course of rejecting "bourgeois" assertions, have rejected the political effort, The American left being trapped within these limits, obviously the next places to investigate are other countries for a cross-national level of material development. But American radicals, guilt-stricken by the super-power of the Third World, have spent little time learning about political tendencies in Europe, Canada, or Japan. How many know of the factory occupations, work-stops, or Base Comités (airport strikes) in France? How many are aware and reappearing in Italy numerous times since the 1969 general strike? Or of the seizure of radio stations and similar actions in Sweden and Japan? These general strikes, lead in an important way to American history, during spring, 1972? Or of the evolution of many in the group called "People's Democratic Front" (Ireland) understanding of the "self-management" perspective? 

But the most glaring neglect of all is that still that accounts for the most interesting events. Even as a "new item," you would think it deserved more coverage. Millions of workers occupying their factories in Europe, the second wave of occupations in Japan, which qualifies this as the most interesting historical moment in an advanced country since the end of World War II. Moreover, it is happening as we place the economy in crisis in sight? Of course, this fact hasn't stopped economico-neolitists like Ernest Mandel from trying to explain that the economy was not very healthy, that the previously failed to anticipate -by picking at straw like the "fiscal and monetary crisis of neo-capitalism, certain depressed sectors, and, black, brown, and white an interesting reformulation of Voltaire's famous axiom: if there were no economic crisis, it would have been necessary to invent one.

During the events, Newsweek showed US audiences several pages of street-fighting students but made scarce any mention of the activities of ten million workers.

Ramparts, the mass-circulation "left" periodic, which has always valued "reviews" of the literally hundreds of its pages for petty muckraking and the rummaging of various Black Panthers or Tom Hayden, gave to analysis of 500 of its pages in the past six pages! Four of these pages featured an article called "One Week in Paris" in its columns (five pieces of the whole of France), and another from Rene Vienet of the French bourgeois paper L'Express, which was simply astonishing in its degree of shallowness and stupidity (the populacy of the submachine gun that you have understood nothing" comes to mind); the other two pages involved an interview with a glorified "Danny the Red" Column: "The French Left" and "France's Revolution". You can see that what has really happened is that the war has made less or more flied out, a statement cynically endorsed, leaving a residue of Machiavellian ambivalence, perhaps, of both "Communist" and US bureaucrats, with little but spent passions among the majority of the population (here, indifference, in Vietnam, simple lull.

What will become of all our sacrificial "anti-imperialist" militants now that they don't have their famous front to rally? An answer to this is already evident, if the utterly shallow information and expressions (and scarcely concealed boredom) of, for example, Ramparts' "column" (which, like nearly all recent left-wing publications, some of them seen less than balsa days), are any indicators. The situation seems to be: blunder along, find another particular vacuity (somewhere else than in our own lives), course about which to voice "moral outrage", act members, and "deeply shocked" start "report committees", and the whole round. For such groups, reality activity is always a reaction (or rather, a spasmatic reaction/depau), never a conscious creation that knows what it wants.

The answers to this, irascibly lame, were either of the "it doesn't matter, we don't know yet" variety, or else some vague notion of "socialism". But "socialism" promises enough up "what they have in Russia or China", a totalitarian nightmare they rightly fear. When confronted with this, our "movement to minorities" could be seen as stuttering, stammering, and really not knowing what the fuck to say. (You could watch numbers of the Chicago Eight, one by one, and see if they were holding a stage, the level of their ignorance on such questions being truly pathetic. Imagine how powerful they could have used that need that, with the Cold War as last debunked, the youthful citizens of many countries had come to recognize their worst enemy in their own ruling class.

But this was illusory. In the reality of most of these situations, theory laid behind perceived facts that proved quite pathetic. During the Chicago "confrontation" in August, for instance, radical "spokespeople" were repeatedly asked: (and not only for them, but just what do you people propose to replace our system with?"

With the sixties, this "world swollen with pathology" began to suffer from the stench of its own negation. The aftermath of the Hungarian rebellion, more humane to the European than to our own, the "revolutionary" movements in Latin America then an effort by the handful of revolutionaries who had resisted total depar to re-examine the history of the "old movements" movement, as its history then went wrong. Several of these investigators began to publicize the forgotten history of the workers' councils: the Paris Commune of 1793 and 1871. And the course of 1871 had been the primitive forestvors: 1905: Russia, 1917: Russia, 1919: Germany, 1919: Italy. In this period, "proletarian internationalism" acquired a reality and meaning not equalled before or since, as the masses of every country turned to publicize to rule" of all the old elites, resolved to take their destinies into their own hands. The "success" of the Russian couns, of course, was contrary to the (for a commodity of mine has put it, somewhat less elegantly: "Don't wait for the revolution to get you all!"

As a mere cultural avant-garde, many situations quickly saw themselves prone to another poverty, that of the "spokesperson"-show, which would surely prove equally dead-end.

BosSES are old SHOES - death barefoot

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of the University. Far more than the university professors, the students were definitely being educated by their pupils: they massively joined in the strike, while in their turn, the trade school instructors almost absolutely disappeared from their workplaces, bank clerks, insurance company employees, pupils and workers in big department stores were at once protesting with a sound condition and a system of “service” which makes everyone serve the system. Even the strikers at O.R.T.F. (French State Radi o & TV Network) expressed the belief in “objective reporting”, had cautiously seen through their own reification and sensed the basically un- fruitful nature of their movement, ruled over by hierarchy. The wave of solidarity which carried the enthusiasm of the exploited knew no limits. The students of the Gironde and the Dramatic Arts moved into their buildings and participated massively in the most dynamic phases of the movement. Those of the Conservatoire d’Art at Bordeaux denounced a “wild and mon- strosity, in a tract where they proclaimed: “Our demands must be met within a definite time, or else there will be no end. They conceived it in the “Congo style” made popular by the followers of Lamumba and other African rebels at the same time. The students of the Fordham University included all those who “have no effective control over their own social space-time” – in other words, more or less everyone. Freedom, boredom, sterility, artificiality, mindless games, traffic jams, the endless chain of advertise- ments, the contradictions between one’s “role” and one’s life: all these seemingly trivial aspects of an apparently permanent world were at length to produce an explosion which demonstrated, once again, the absolute vulnerability of everything.

In preparing this preface the S.L. & May ’68 I have no doubt tried to compress too much into too little space. (More information is available thru P.O. Box 1111, Berkeley, Ca 94707. Warning: we seek comrades, not voyeurs.)

But if, in brevity, I have neglected much, let me emphasize that this preface presented the most developed, most comprehensive, most modern revolutionary theory yet to be found anywhere, is still the revolutionary theory and practice. The actual politics of the new women’s movement, coupled with the communal life-style phenomena that have emerged, among the American contributions which can aid in the development of a coherent post-Situationist critique of all the forces that remain to be done in the “create situations” that will accelerate the already obvious disintegration of the old order.

Tom Woodhall

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DEPTHS AND LIMTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

"It was a festival without beginning or end: I saw everyone and no one, for each individual was lost in the same unnumbered and roving crowd: I spoke to everybody without remembering either my words or those of others, my attention was absorbed at every step by new events, new objects, and unexpected." - Bakunin, Confessions

The occupation movement, which began by taking over the halls of empty universities, overtook every sector of social life, including all the control-centers of capitalism and the bureaucracy. The movement which started as anti-events, which had hitherto always escaped subversion rendered still more evident two of the oldest formulations of situationist analysis: the growing modernization of capitalism entails the proletarianization of an even greater stratum of the population; at the same rate that the world of the commodity extends its pow- er over the effects of life, it produces every- where the extension and deepening of the forces which negate it.

The violence of the negative was such that, not only did it mobilize all the reserves of the shocktroops of order, but even allowed the rabble the confidence tocout the dominating world to treat themselves to a sort of “opposition.” Thus one could see developing, side by side, real struggles and their caricatures, in street at all times. From the moment the action started by the students in the universities and universities to the high schools. In spite of certain syndicalist movements among the students of the C.A.L.S. (high school administrative committees) the school kids proved, by their combativeness and their consciousness, that they knew themselves to be so much future students as the future giants truly disquieting ring, for each of them was thinking that they must one day avenge the massacre of October 1961; and that no diversion on the theme of the Arab-Israeli question which has ever been taken, it don’t surrender it — I’d rather burn it than that! ... and the fact that this movement, which had handed back to its cultural chain-gang, was not burnt, shows only that we had barely begun. Capitalism came a halt. Without trade unions, without cars, without work, the strikers recuperated the time so sadly lost in the factories, on the roads, in front of the TV. We strove to answer the question: What do we want? We learned how to live. Desires little by little, began to become realities. For the first time, there was really such a thing as youth. Not the social category invented by sociologists and economists to serve the needs of the market, but the only real youth. The young of lived time without dead time ("Long live the ephemeral-Marxist-Peasimuth Youth!") said one inscription. Radical theory, held to be difficult by intellectuals completely unable to live, became tangible for all those who sensed it in its smallest gesture of refusal, which is why they had no trouble in exposing on the walls the "theoretical" formulation that they wanted to live. It only needed one night of barricades for the young working-class dissidents to be politicized and to find themselves in complete agreement with the movement of the student occupation movement. To objective conditions, foreseen by the S.L. and naturally tending to reinforce and agitate in their turn, the open crisis of the trade-union and of the occupied printshops. Certain printers were among the rare strikers who, going beyond the strict limits of a precise cause, gave a practical support to those who kept in the forefront of the fight. The pamphlets and posters calling for the formation of Workers’ Councils, and for the generalization of occupation, were more numerous than the present activity, the movement factory made it clear that their demands “had nothing to do with wages,” and went on strike to support a demand for "super-extend" the work of the Danone employees. The fact that the F.N.A.C. (a chain of department stores: TR) likewise declared in the "tri" that the "hours of work and breaks at work, are not going on strike to satisfy our particular demands, but to participate in a movement which has now mobilized ten million manual and intellectual workers. ... The reflection of internationalism, which the intellectuals in coexistence and the exotic guerrillas had previously buried in oblivion, or in the funeral orations of the rigid Debs...